

Ṣaḥīḥ of Imām Muslim
and
Commentary of al-Nawawi
Rendered into English

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***Kitāb al- Īmān* (Book of Faith)**

Chapter: 1

1. Explication of *Īmān*, *Islām*, *Iḥsān*, obligation to believe in divine predestination and decree, and the basis for renouncing the disbeliever in divine decree and for using strong words for him.

EXPLANATION: HEADING AND INTRODUCTION

The discussions on this topic generally revolve around the difference of opinion over the meaning and application of the terms *īmān* and *islām* and their specificity and generality. It also discusses questions such as the following: Is *īmān* subject to increase and decrease or not? Is doing good deeds included in *īmān* or not? Scholars from the earliest times as well as the later generations have discussed all these issues abundantly. I would confine the discussion to quote partly from the variety of saying attributed to them. It will suffice us for our purpose. However, certain additions will also come to the surface during the course of discussion.

Imām Abū Sulayman Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Khaṭṭābī al-Bastī al-Shāfi‘ī, one of the literati and jurist, says in his magnum opus *Ma‘ālam al-Sunan*: People have frequently fell into error in this question. As for Al-Zuhrī he says: *al-islām* is to state (the belief) and *al-īmān* is to put it into practice. He bases his understanding on the following verse: The bedouins say: "We believe." Say: "You believe not but you only say, 'We have surrendered (*aslamnā*),' for Faith (*īmān*) has not yet entered your hearts. (Q 49:14) Some others have opined that *īmān* and *islām* are the same thing. They based themselves on the following verse of the Qur’an: So We brought out from therein the believers (*mu‘minīn*). But We found not there any household of the Muslims (*muslimīn*) except one. (Q 51:35-6)

Al-Khaṭṭābī continues: Subsequently one great scholar of the *ummah* would own up either of these views and defend it. Another would follow the opposite and write hundreds of pages. He says: The sound view in this regard is that no general statement be given in this matter. We should speak only in specific terms. The reason is that a *muslim* may be a *mu‘min* at certain point of time. He may not be a *mu‘min* at another point in time. However, a *mu‘min* is *muslim* universally, all the time. Thus every *mu‘min* is a *muslim* but not every *muslim* is a *mu‘min*. When you take this course of understanding the interpretation of the relevant verses is set for you on the firm track. The conclusion would then be balanced and there would remain no room for disputation.

The essence of *īmān* is confirmation from heart. The essence of *islām* is submission and obedience. A man at time can feign to be a *muslim* without subjecting his inner self to the faith. Similarly a man at time can be truly believer in his inner intention but still refuse to follow the faith practically.

Al-Khaṭṭābī has given a relevant comment on the Prophetic tradition: *īmān* has a little more than seventy branches. He says: This tradition explains that *īmān* is a term that is applied to a meaning that has many aspects and branches. This implied thing has a lower as well as a higher degree. The term is equally applied to the parts as well as the whole. The reality of the thing termed *īmān* would require accomplishing all of its branches and covering all of its parts. An example is the word *ṣalāh*, the worship

ritual. It has branches and parts. The term can be applied to the parts as well as the whole. However, the true discharge of *ṣalāh* would be covering the entire ritual and accomplishing all of its units. This is also proved by the Prophetic saying: “Modesty is a branch of *īmān*” This proves the degrees in *īmān* and difference between the levels of the believers.

Imām Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Mas‘ūd al-Baghawī al-Shāfi‘ī commented on the *ḥadīth* in which the angel Jibrīl questions the Prophet [pbuh] about *islām* and *īmān* and the latter’s response and said: According to the Prophet [pbuh] *islām* is the name for the actions that are apparent and *īmān* is the name of the internal beliefs. It does not mean that the deeds are not part of *īmān* or the confirmation of the heart is not part of *islām*. Rather it only gives a general description of a reality. In reality two of them are the same thing. Both combine to make the religion. This is why the Prophet [pbuh] said: “He is Jibrīl who came to teach you your religion.” Confirmation of the heart and deeds are covered both by *īmān* and *islām*. This is further affirmed by the following divine sayings:

Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam. (Q 3:19)

... and have chosen for you Islam as your religion. (Q 5:3)

And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, (Q 3:85)

Thus Allah Almighty has informed us that the religion that He has chosen for us and that which He shall accept from His servants is *Islām*. The religion of a servant is never acceptable and cannot earn Allah pleasure unless it is based on confirmation of the heart corroborated by the deeds. Here ends the saying of al-Baghawī.

Imām Abū ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl b. Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl al-Tamīmī al-Iṣbahānī al-Shāfi‘ī writes in his book *al-Taḥrīr fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: “Linguistically the word *īmān* is confirmation of the heart. In this sense it does not increase or decrease as confirmation is not something that can be factorized so that at time we imagine its perfection at one point and deficiency at another. As a religious legal term it means confirmation of the heart and practicing the pillars of the religion. In this sense it admits of increase and decrease. This is the viewpoint of the people of the sunnah.” He says: “The real well researched question about the difference of opinion on this issue can be framed thus: Can a person who believes in his heart but does not put into the practice what the belief entails be called a believer in absolute terms? The preferred view in our opinion is that he cannot be termed a believer in absolute terms. The Prophet [pbuh] says: “A *zānī* (adulterer) does not commit *zinā* (sex out of wedlock) while he has faith.” The reason behind this Prophetic judgment is that the sinner has not acted upon the dictates of the faith he professes. Therefore, he cannot be absolutely termed a believer. End quote from the author of *al-Taḥrīr*.

In his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī*, Imām Abū al-Ḥasan Alī b. Khalaf b. Baṭṭāl al-Mālikī says: The view of the group of *Ahl al-Sunnah* from among the earliest and the later authorities is that *īmān* is both verbal declaration and corroborative deeds. It increases as well decreases. The argument for this proposition can be found in the verses quoted by Imām Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. These are:

1..... that they might add faith (*īmān*) to their faith. (Q 48:4)

2. and WE increased them in guidance. (Q 18:13)

3. God further enlightens those who seek guidance. (Q 19:76)
4. And those who follow guidance, He increases them in guidance (Q 47:17)
5. and those who believe may increase in faith (*īmānā*) (Q. 74:31)
6. Which of you has had his Faith increased by it?" As for those who believe, it has increased their Faith, (Q 9:124)
7. so fear them; but this increased their faith... (Q. 3:173)
8. And it only added to their faith and submission. (Q 33:22)

Ibn Baṭṭāl says: If *īmān* of a man does not increase it is defective. He says: If it is said, “*īmān* is literally confirmation of the heart” I would respond that the confirmation obtains perfection through all the obedient acts. The more the believer performs pious deeds the more perfect his faith grows. Thus *īmān* grows with all the pieties and decreases if they decrease. When doing the pieties decreases the perfection in the *īmān* decreases. When doing the pieties increases the perfection in *īmān* grows stronger. This is the most balanced view in the question of *īmān*. As for the affirmation of the faith in Almighty and the Messenger that does not decrease. That is why Imām Malik, according to some reports, avoided accepting that *īmān* decreases for the loss in affirmation (*taṣdīq*) is not allowed. The reason is when the *taṣdīq* decreases it grows into doubt and therefore out of the sphere of the term *īmān*.

Some of the scholars explained that Imām Malik avoided to express the view that *īmān* decreases only in order to avoid coming in line with the view of the kharijites who excommunicate the believers due to the sins they commit. Imām Malik has been reported to have held that belief decreases following the general view of the Ahl al-Sunnah. ‘Abd Al-Razzāq says: I have heard the teachers and Shaykhs I have met including Sufyān al-Thawrī, Ibn Jurayj, Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah say: *Īmān* consists of declaration and corresponding action. It increases and decreases. The same is the view of Ibn Mas‘ūd, Hudhayfah, al-Nakh‘ī, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, ‘Aṭā’, Ṭā’ūs, Mujāhid and ‘Abd Allah b. al-Mubārīk. Thus implication of their statement follows. Things that earn a man praise and association to the believers are three: confirmation of the heart, declaration of tongue and practical action of the body parts. This is because there is no difference among all the believers that a man who declares faith and does action without knowledge and recognition of His Lord cannot be termed *mu’min*. Similarly, a man who declared that he believes in Allah and His Messengers, all of them, but does not carry out the obligations cannot be termed a *mu’min* in absolute terms. Even if in the convention of Arabic language he may be termed a *mu’min* on the basis of his affirmation alone yet in the terminology of the speech of God he cannot be termed as such for the Almighty Allah says: “The believers are such that when they are reminded of Allah Almighty their hearts feel a dread. And when the verses of Allah are recited to them it adds to their belief and on their Lord do they rely. The ones who establish the *ṣalāh* and out of which We have granted them do they spend. These are the *mu’min* in reality. (Q. 8:2) Thus the Almighty Allah, the pure and exalted one, has informed us about the true definition, identity and attributes of a believer. Ibn Baṭṭāl gave the following comments on the chapter *The One who held: īmān is action*:

If it is said: you have already acknowledged that *īmān* is but confirmation. We shall explain: confirmation is the first step towards the stages of *īmān*. It earns the agent entry in *īmān*. It does not imply that he has consummated his *īmān* and achieved all its heights. Such a man cannot be termed a *mu’min* in absolute terms. This is the view of the party of the people of Sunnah that it *īmān* is saying and action.

Abū ‘Ubayd says: This is the view of Imām Mālik, al-Thawrī, al-Awzā‘ī and other heroes of the fields of knowledge and sunnah as were the beacons of guidance and Imāms of the religion among the people of Hejaz, Iraq, Syria and others. Ibn Baṭṭāl says:

This is the meaning that Imām Bukhārī aimed at establishing in the Chapter on *Īmān*. He has chaptalized the section under the same theme. He uses the chapter headings like the following ones: Bāb ‘Amūr al-Īmān (questions about īmān), Bāb al-*Ṣalāh* is part of Īmān, Bāb *Zakāh* is part of Īmān, Bāb Jihad is part of Īmān and other chapters named on the same line. He actually intended to rebut the following view of the Murj’ah: *Īmān* is statement without action. He also sought to explain the blunder of the Murji’ah, the incorrectness of their creed and their contradiction to the Book of God, the Sunnah, and the views of the Imāms.

Under another chapter Ibn Baṭṭāl comments: al-Muhallib says: *islām* in reality is *īmān* which is the contract bound by the heart affirming the statement of the tongue other than which nothing is useful in the sight of God. Al-Karāmatīyah and some of the Murji’ah say: *Īmān* is profession by the tongue excluding the confirmation in the heart. The strongest rebuttal against them can be found in the fact that the Muslim *ummah* is unanimous that the hypocrites can be excommunicated in spite of their declaration of faith in Allah and the Messenger. The Almighty says: Never pray for any of them at his death. Never stand (praying) on his grave. For they have disbelieved in Allah His Messenger [.....] while they disbelieve. (Q. 9:84-5). Here concludes the quote from Ibn Baṭṭāl.

Imām Abū ‘Amr b. Al-Ṣalāh says: The words “*islām* is that you declare that there is no God but Allah and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah, establish the *ṣalāh*, do *zakāh*, fast Ramadan, and pilgrim the House of Allah if you can. And *īmān* is that you believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His Messengers, the Last Judgment and predestination, good and evil of it.” He says: This explains the essence of *īmān*, that is the inner confirmation, as well as the essence of *islām*, that is external submission and adherence. The external status of *islām* is established by the two declarations. The *ṣalāh*, *zakāh*, hajj and fasting have been ascribed to it considering that they are the major and the clearest signs of the religion. By establishing these, the believer brings his submission to perfection. By ignoring these symbols of the religion he shows that his adherence to the faith and his submission to it suffer from defects. The word *īmān* also covers all that has been mentioned in the explanation of the word *islām* in this *ḥadīth* as well as all the other acts of piety for they all are fruits, complements and protection of the inner secret confirmation that is the basis and foundation of *īmān*. That is why we see that the Prophet [pbuh] explained *īmān*, according to the *ḥadīth* of the delegates of Abd al-Qays, by the two declarations, *ṣalāh*, *zakāh*, fasting Ramadan and paying one fifth of the war booty. On this basis we hold that the word *mu’min* cannot be absolutely applied to those who commit grave sins and changed a foundational obligation. The reason is that in absolute sense a term can only be applied to the most perfect of the signified. It is not applied to something that it denotes but only apparently except with a qualification. This is why it is possible to reject the absolute presence of *īmān* in a grave sinner in the following *ḥadīth*: “A thief does not steal while being a *mu’min*. The name *islām* also covers the foundation of *īmān* that is confirmation in the heart. It also covers the foundation of all the pious deeds for all that comes under *istislām* (submission). He says: Thus all that we have mentioned and established shows that the terms *īmān* and *islām* are interchangeable in some contexts and different in meaning in some others. It also transpires that all the *mu’mins* are *muslims* but not all the *muslims* are *mu’mins*. He says: This discussion offers sufficient research on the reconciliation of the apparent mutual contradictions between the texts of the Qur’an and Sunnah related to *īmān* and *islām* which at times have been misinterpreted by the scholars. My conclusions on the issue correspond to the views of the majority of the scholars of *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* and others. Here the statement of Shaykh Abū ‘Amr b. Al-Ṣalāh ends.

When the view we have quoted from among the standpoints of the Imāms of the past is established it transpires that they all agree on that the *īmān* increases and decreases. This is the view point of the Muḥaddithūn of the past and a party of the theologians. However, the majority of the theologians have rejected the view that *īmān* increases and decreases. They held: When *īmān* admits of increase it means that originally it was doubt or even rejection. As for those of the theologians who believe it does increase and increase they say: Confirmation (*taṣdīq*) in itself does not grow or decrease. However, *īmān* in legal sense increases by increase in its fruits i.e. good deeds and decreases when it does not bear the fruit. They held that this way they have achieved reconciliation between the texts that admit of its increase and the views of the earlier authorities on the one hand and between these two and the linguistic use of the terms as are prominent among the views of the scholastics theologians.

This statement of the last group apparently seems excellent. However, the sounder view is that *taṣdīq* in itself admits of increase through greater use of reasoning and the growing number of the corroborating arguments. This is why the *īmān* of the *ṣiddīqīns* (confirmers) is stronger than that of the others as the former are not shaken by doubts. Their *īmān* is not hurt by an attack on it. Rather their *īmān* continues to grow shining and flaring in spite of the different in their states and circumstances. As for the others including *al-mu'allafah* (those whose hearts are won by giving them a share in the taxes and financial contributions) and others like them their case is not the same. Therefore, the conclusion that cannot be rebutted and that an intelligent person cannot doubt is that the *taṣdīq* by Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq in itself was so strong that none among the rest of the individuals can be compared with him. Based on this al-Bukhārī says in his Ṣaḥīḥ:

Ibn Abī Malīkah says: I have been blessed with the meeting with thirty of the Companions of the Prophet [pbuh]. All of them feared that they might be suffering from hypocrisy. None of them would say: My faith is like that of Jibrīl or Mikā'il. God knows best.

Whether the term *īmān* can be applied to deeds? The view agreed upon among the people of the truth is that it is. This view is supported by innumerable number of arguments from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. These arguments are so well known that they cannot be possibly improve more in this scale. The Almighty Allah says:

And God is not such that He should like to render your faith (*īmān*) wasted. (Q 2:143)

The scholars are unanimous on that the word *īmān* in this verse signifies the *ṣalāh*. As for the *ḥadīths* supporting this view there are many such sayings scattered on the pages of this book that can suffice you. God knows best.

The Muḥaddithūn, jurists and scholastic theologians from among the Ahl al-Sunnah agree on that the *mu'min* who is judged to fall within the people of the Qiblah (that is Muslims), be ending up in Paradise and saved from everlasting punishment in Hell is the one who has firm faith of the heart in the religion of *Islām*. His faith must be free from doubts. He declares the two declarations. If he confines himself to the one declaration (that is belief on one God alone) he cannot be considered to be primarily one of the people of the Qiblah. However, if he failed to speak due to a physical defect in his tongue or due to lack of power to do so as he is struck by death at the moment or any other incapacitating malady then he can be considered *mu'min* even if he does not speak out the second declaration.

When someone declares both the declarations he is not required to say: I denounce all the religions as go against *Islām*. If however he belongs to those of the rejecters who consider the prophethood of Muḥammad [pbuh] specific for the Arabs then he is forced to denounce all the other religions. Unless he

does so he is not considered a Muslim. Some of the followers of Imām Shafi’I believe that a convert is obliged to denounce all other religions except *islām* in all cases. However, this view is not tenable at all.

The well-known view of the scholars of our school and that of the others regarding the man who confines himself to only the first declaration and does not say, “Muḥammad is the Messenger of God” is that he is not a Muslim. Some of our scholars have opined that such a man is Muslim but is required to state the other declaration as well. If he refuses to do he is treated like an apostate. The upholder of this view base themselves on the following saying of the Prophet [pbuh]: “I have been commanded to fight the people until they declare “there is no god but Allah”. When they have said it they shall have saved their life and wealth.” The majority of the scholars interpret it to cover both the declarations. The prophetic statement considers the first declaration to suffice for both because both are well-known and immediately connected. God knows best.

Does the man who declares that the *ṣalāh*, fasting and other pillars of *Islām* are obligatory while he is no more adhering to his previous religion become a Muslim? To the scholars of our school have two opinions on this question. There are those who consider such a person Muslim. They based themselves on the following principle: Everything rejection of which throws a believer out of the folds of *Islām* should make a person accepting that to be counted among the believers.

Is the man who makes the two declarations in a non-Arabic language while he speaks Arabic well is a Muslim? Our scholars have offered two responses to this question. The more correct view is that he becomes Muslim for he has professed faith. This is the true response. The counter view does not have a firm basis. I have discussed and clarified it exhaustively in my commentary *al-Muhadhdhab*. God knows best.

The scholars among the pious elders and the others have differed over the following general statement by a man: “I am a *mu’min*.” A party of the scholars holds that he should not stop at “I am a *mu’min*” but should say: I am a *mu’min*, God willing.” Some of the scholars of our school have ascribed this view to a great number of our scholastic theologians. Some others however have held that this general statement can be made. They say that the man should not add “God willing”. This second view is the favorite one as it has been offered by the sounder researchers.

Al-Awzā’ī and others have opined that both the statements are allowable. Both are correct seen from different angles. Whoever, utters the statement in general term does so considering his present state. The laws of the Shari’ah are applicable to him. As for the man who adds the words “God willing”, they opined, he does so in order to seek blessings or hoping to get to the good end. He intends to say that he does not know what his end will be as he does not know whether God has destined for him to be steadfast on the faith or he will deviate. This last explanation is sounder if we analyze the origin of the first two views. It also removes the ground for difference of opinion.

What about a person who says: I am *kāfir*? There is a strange difference of opinion among the scholars of the school. Some of them say: We can say he is *kāfir* but we cannot add the words “God willing”. Some others however held that it can be said in a restricted sense as has been the case with the Muslim saying “I am a *mu’min* God willing.” Thus the statement “He is *kāfir*, God willing” in restricted sense can be made so as to mean that future is not known and he may become *kāfir* later at the end. This view has been professed by some of the researchers. God knows best.

Know that the view of the people of the truth is that we cannot excommunicate anyone from among the people of the *qiblah* due to his sins. Nor can we excommunicate the innovators and followers of the

desires of the flesh. However, if anyone rejects the parts of the religion that are known to the believers by necessity (as are absolutely authentic parts and commandments of the religion) he is judged to have apostatized and have committed rejection of the faith itself. There is an exception to it. If someone has recently entered *Islām* or has been living in a far flung countryside so as he is not exposed to the foundational teachings of *Islām* then he is not declared *kāfir* and is taught properly. However, even after that he continues rejecting these things he shall be excommunicated. Same is the judgment for the one who allows *zinā*, drinking, killing and other prohibitions which every believer must know and all believers know to be prohibited. These are the statements dealing with *īmān* which I have put in the beginning of the book as introduction because they shall be repeated referred to. They frequently come in the *aḥadīth* of the book. That is why I have put them in the beginning so that I can refer to them when I come across things that originate in them. God knows best.

All gratitude is due to God. All blessings come from Him. All ability is His grant and to Him goes all protection.
